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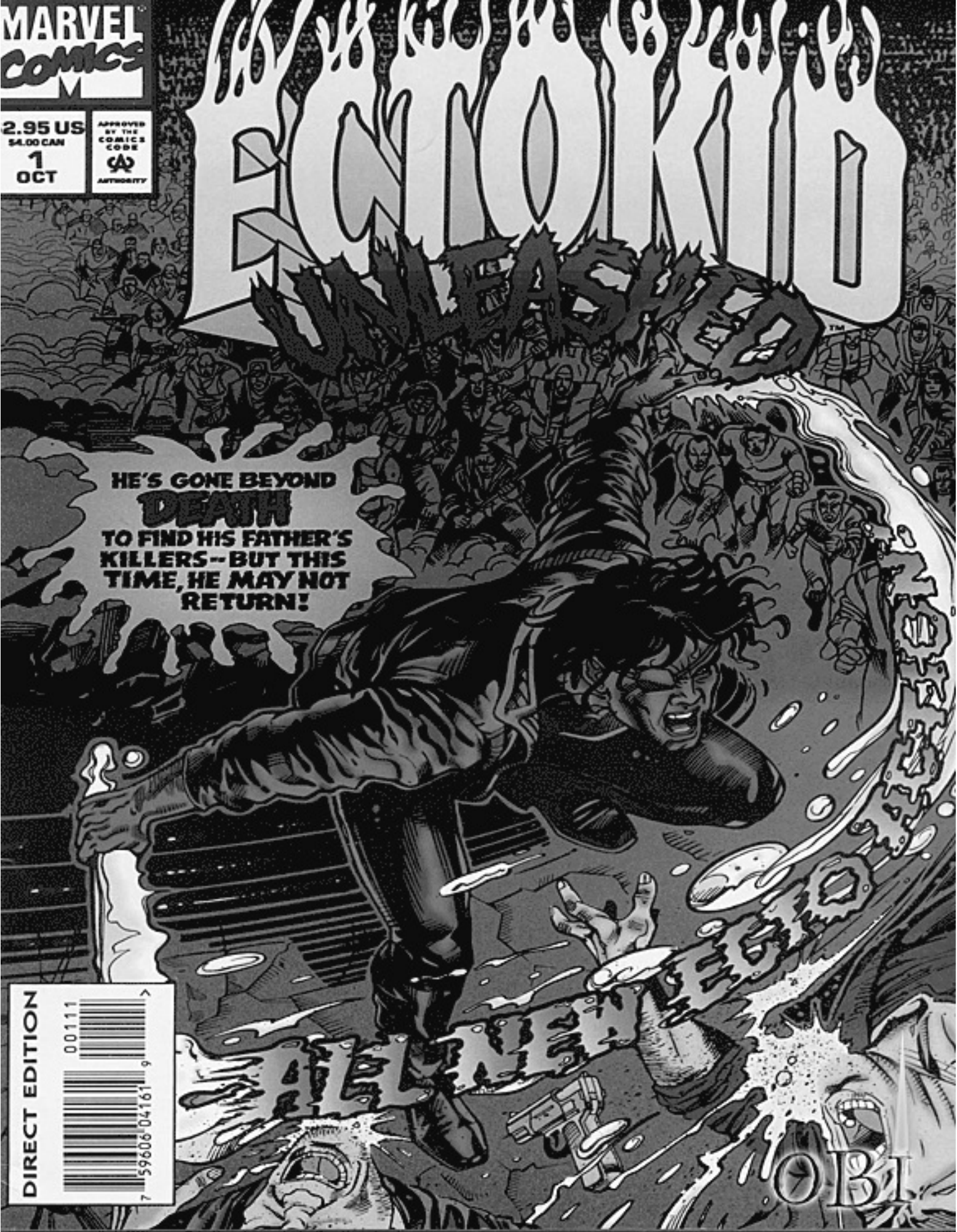
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OCT
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EGTOKID
HE'S GONE BEYOND DEATH TO FIND HIS FATHER'S KILLERS--BUT THIS TIME, HE MAY NOT RETURN!
DIRECT EDITION
OBI

THE BLADE IS RAZOR SHARP.
THE SCREAM IS TEN TIMES SHARPER.
NO! NO! GET AWAY FROM ME, YOW MANIACS! GET AWAY!
C'MON, ICE... PLEASE DON'T STRUGGLE SO... PLEASE...
LISTEN TO YOUR BROTHER, ICE AUGUSTINE...
...BE CALM AND ACCEPT YOUR DUTY.
CLIVE BARKER PRESENTS...
Ectokid
unnatural causes!

CREATED BY CLIVE BARKER

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YOU ARE SWORN TO SERVE HIS...
...AND TO SERVE HIS, YOU MUST SUBMIT.
WHAT THE CARDINAL'S TRYING TO POINT OUT, FRIEND, IS THAT WE OF THE EXPURGATORIUS HAVE A LITTLE PROBLEM.
YOU MADE A RECKLESS MISTAKE WHEN YOU KILLED LEO MELHART. TRUTH IS, WE NEVER WANTED HIM DEAD.
B-BUT SENATOR, WHY? YOU'VE GOT THAT BLASTED AHRAT THING HE MADE!
WHY, SO WE HAVE...
KiK
...THE AHRAT!
LEO MELHART'S MASTERPIECE, THE KEY TO THE RESOURCES WE SEEK. WITH IT, WE CAN OPEN A CONDUIT INTO THE ECTOSPHERE, AND TAP ITS LIMITLESS POWER...
...BUT THE DEVICE IS AS INTRICATE AS IT IS PRECIOUS.
WE NEED MELHART TO OPERATE IT.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! HE'S DEAD...BEYOND THE VEIL...LOST IN THE STINKING ECTOSPHERE! HOW CAN YOU HOPE TO FIND HIM UNLESS...

YOU WILL FIND HIM FOR US... AND THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO REACH THE OTHER SIDE...
WOOOOOOO
THE DEATH SCREAM ECHOES THROUGH THE IRON BUTTRESSES OF THE HERMITAGE AND IS LOST IN THE RAGING STORM OUTSIDE.
THEN SILENCE FALLS ON THE OFF-SHORE SANCTUM OF THE EXPHRASTORIUS, A SILENCE BROKEN BY THE RASPING VOICE OF THE CARDINAL...
NOT AS FORMAL A RITUAL AS I'D HAVE LIKED, BUT TIME IS SHORT. NOW WE HAVE A MAN ON THE INSIDE...
...DON'T WE, ICE?

NEW ORLEANS, THE FRENCH QUARTER.
YOU DON'T SURVIVE LONG ON THESE STREETS UNLESS YOU FOLLOW THE RULES:
WATCH YOUR BACK.
ON OTHERS' TURF, SHARE YOUR TAKE OR RISK YOUR LIFE.
HEY, ONE-EYE! WHAT'S IN THE BAG, HALF-BREED?
KNOW WHEN TO FEAR.
AND WHEN TO FIGHT.
OKAY, GUYS... I KNOW THE STREET CODE...
HE FEELS THE ECTO-PLASM BLEED OUT TO TAKE THE SHAPE OF HIS DESIRE, INVISIBLE TO HIS ATTACKERS...
...IN YOUR TERRITORY, WHAT'S MINE...
...GETS SHARED!
ON THESE STREETS, YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW THE RULES ...UNLESS, LIKE DEX MUNGO, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE YOUR OWN.

HE'S GOTTEN BETTER AT MANIPULATING HIS SOUL-STUFF IN THE PAST WEEKS OF PRACTICE.
FOR WHAT HE'S GOT PLANNED, HE'S GOING TO NEED IT.
Y-YOU'RE DEAD, BOY!
DEAD!
THEY'RE HALF-RIGHT. DEX IS HALF-DEAD.
IT WASN'T TILL ADOLESCENCE THAT DEX LEARNED HE HAD BEEN FATHERED BY A GHOST.
THAT HERITAGE GAVE HIM THE POWER TO SEE INTO THE HERE-AFTER...
...AND CONTROL OVER ECTOPLASM.
THESE DAYS, HE USES THE TALENTS OF THE DEAD TO KEEP HIM IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.
SOMETIMES, MY SHEER STYLE IMPRESSES EVEN ME...!
SOON BE HOME AND DRY...
...SAFE AND SOUND.

MY GUESS IS THOSE GUYS'D KICK THEMSELVES IF THEY KNEW THEY'D RISKED LIFE AND LIMB...
...OVER A DOUBLE SWISS AND SALAMI.
THE ADRENALINE RUSH SUBSIDES, AND DARKER THOUGHTS RETURN. IT HAS NOT BEEN LONG SINCE ICE AUGUSTINE STOLE THE AURAT...
...AND KILLED DEX'S MOTHER.
NOW DEX LONGS FOR VENGEANCE AGAINST AUGUSTINE AND HIS EMPLOYERS, THE EXPHRGATORIUS.
HIS PHANTOM FATHER-- LEO MELHART-- IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN AID HIM IN THIS. BUT FIRST HE HAS TO FIND HIM...
...AND THAT MEANS GOING BACK...

...INTO THE ECTOSPHERE.
IT'S A WORLD UNKNOWN TO MORTAL MAN, FOREVER OUT OF SIGHT.
BUT NOT TO DEX. HE CAN SEE BEYOND INTO THE GHOST SHADOW OF REALITY...
...LEAVE HIS BODY BEHIND...
AT LAST...
...AND SET FOOT BEHIND THE VEIL.
...I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK YOU'D NEVER GET HERE, MUNGO.
AUGUSTINE? YOU MURDERING PIECE OF FILTH!
I'LL BREAK YOUR STINKING H--
WAIT! I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU... I WANT YOUR HELP.

LOOK! LOOK! THIS IS WHAT I GOT FOR BEING LOYAL TO THE EX-PURGATORIUS! A BLADE THROUGH THE HEART!
HOW ELSE D'YOU THINK I GOT HERE?
BUT THAT'S OVER NOW. I KNOW I'VE GOT A LOT TO MAKE UP FOR...
...BEFORE I CAN PASS BEYOND THE ECTOSPHERE.
I'VE WRONGED YOU, BOY... WRONGED YOU BAD. THERE'S NO GOOD REASON YOU SHOULD TRUST ME... OR EVER FORGIVE ME.
BUT BELIEVE THIS... I'M WITH YOU. I HATE THE EXPUR-GATORIUS AS MUCH AS YOU!
WHAT ARE YOU AFTER, SCUM?
SAME AS YOU. LOOKING FOR YOUR PA.
I'M LOOKING AT PAYBACK, BOY.
IF WE COULD TALK TO HIM, WE--
FORGET IT, KILLER! I WON'T LEAD YOU TO MY FATHER!
I FIGURE YOUR OLD MAN HAS THE INSIDE TRACK ON THE EXPURGATORIUS.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO. I ALREADY KNOW WHERE HE IS...

"... GRUNGE THE SOUL-BROKER HAS HIM."
THAT'S KEEP GRUNGE, DEXY-BOY.
I BEAT THE SECRET OF A WAY IN OUTTA ONE O' GRUNGE'S SOUL-COLLECTOR BOYS.
I'LL BE STRAIGHT WITH YOU. THE EXPURGATORIUS KILLED ME SO I COULD COME HERE AND FIND MELHART FOR 'EM.
BUT, Y'KNOW, A KNIFE IN THE HEART MAKES A MAN RETHINK HIS ALLEGIANCES.
I WANT TO CRUCIFY THE EXPURGATORIUS. MELHART CAN HELP ME DO THAT, BUT SEEIN' AS I KILLED HIM, I NEED YOU TO CONVINCE HIM I'M ON THE LEVEL.
DO THAT FOR ME... AND I'LL SHOW YOU THE WAY IN THERE.
THE MOMENT YOU TRY YOUR OLD TRICKS, I'LL TAKE YOU APART.
TRUST ME, BOY!
SUCKER...

OH-HO! I'M AMAZED HOW A SON'S LOVE FOR HIS PAPA CAN MAKE HIM FORGIVE SO MUCH.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FILTH?
C'MON, BOY! 'SAT BEST YOU CAN DO?
IN THIS PLACE, STRENGTH IS WHAT YOU WILL IT TO BE. THE SPIRIT FORM IS DRIVEN BY THE WILL-POWER BEHIND IT.
GUESS I HAVE A STRONG WILL. HOW 'BOUT YOU?
MELHART'S NO GOOD GUY, MUNGO. 'FORE HE SIRED YOU, HE WAS ONE OF THE EXPURGATORIUS HIMSELF.
CALLED HIMSELF THE SCIENTIST.
NO WAY!
COME ON! WHY D'YOU THINK THEY'VE BEEN AFTER HIM? THE SECT WANTED ESOTERIC POWER. THEY'D MADE CONTACT WITH GRUNGE THROUGH A SEANCE.
GRUNGE TOLD MELHART THE SECRETS TO FINISH THE AHRAT.
THE PRICE WAS MELHART'S SOUL!
OH, YES! HE WAS THE STAR PLAYER BACK THEN. BUT ONCE HE HAD THE AHRAT, HE FELL OUT WITH 'EM... LEFT TO DO HIS OWN THING.
I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF, DAD MADE SURE OF THAT.
GOT GREEDY, I GUESS. DIDN'T WANT TO SHARE. THAT'S WHY THE EXPURGATORIUS HAD ME... KILL HIM.
AND THAT'S WHY HE TRIED TO COME BACK THROUGH YOU.
WHAT?!

KEEP YOUR LIES TO YOURSELF, AUGUSTINE. I PREFER TO HEAR MY FATHER'S SIDE OF THIS!
THEN I'LL MAKE YOU EAT YOUR LIES...
SURE YOU WILL.
JUST MAKE SURE YOU'RE READY FOR A DISAPPOINTMENT, MUNGO. DADDY AIN'T NO SAINT...
...AND YOU'RE JUST ANOTHER OF HIS CLEVER-CLEVER TOYS!

STILL SILENCE REIGNS WITHIN THE FORTRESS.
THE AIR IS RANK, AND STAINED WITH OILY SMOKE.
AND THE SOULS HERE ARE DARKER STILL.
HI THERE.
EH?
WHATH' HECK?
SWRRRUK!
YEE-HAH! POP GOES THE NECK-BONE!
AN' AS FOR YOU...
SHRRIK
OPEN THE CELL, DEXY! I'LL HIDE THE STIFFS.
DEX OBEYS, HIS HEART POUNDING.
HE MAY BE UNLOCKING MORE THAN JUST A PRISON DOOR...

...IN HERE THERE MAY BE SECRETS HE DOESN'T WANT TO LEARN.
THE SECRETS OF HIS FATHER.
D-DEX? IS IT REALLY YOU?
YEAH.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG! I THOUGHT I'D NEVER SEE YOU AG--
HOLD ON, DAD. I NEED TO KNOW THE TRUTH.. ABOUT YOU AND THE EXPURGATORIUS.
WERE YOU PART OF THEIR EVIL?
I... THAT WAS YEARS AGO, DEX. I WAS A DIFFERENT MAN...
SO THAT MEANS YES?
I WARNED YOU, BOY.
GEE, YOU MUST BE STUNNED!
WHKK
UGNH!
WELL HEY THERE, LEO! HOW'S THE AFTERLIFE TREATIN' YA?
WE GOT THINGS TO DISCUSS. MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH.

HIS HEAD SPINS LIKE A CAROUSEL.
HE HAS NO IDEA HOW LONG HE'S BEEN OUT.
ALL HE KNOWS IS THAT ICE BETRAYED HIM YET AGAIN...
...AND ICE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS FATHER.
LEO MELHART IS AS EVIL AS THE REST OF THEM. DEX AND HIS MOTHER MUST'VE BEEN JUST PAWNS IN MELHART'S HANDS.
AND NOW ICE AND HIS FATHER HAVE LEFT HIM TO DIE...
...IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE SOUL-BROKER'S KILLERS!
HE'S SPRUNG MELHART! WASTE HIM!
KA-POW!
DEX REMEMBERS HIS FIRST ADVENTURE IN THE ECTOSPHERE.
THEN, HE WONDERED, WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE KILLED IN THE WORLD BEYOND DEATH?
HIS ANSWER: 'YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW.'

ECTOPLASMIC CROSSFIRE CHASES HIM ALONG THE RAFTERS...
...BUT HIS WILL TO SURVIVE IS DRIVEN BY ANGER AND HURT.
HE FINDS A STRENGTH HE HAS NOT KNOWN BEFORE...
...ACROSS THE ROOF-SPACE...
...AND ONTO SOLID STONE.
...AND LEAPS...
THEY SURGE UP TO MEET HIM...
...FROM ALL SIDES.
OH, BROTHER!

UNTIL THERE'S NOWHERE LEFT TO RUN...
...AND NO DESIRE TO.
BREAKING DEMON-BONE... THAT FEELS GOOD ENOUGH TO HIM.
COME ON, YOU UGLY SUCKERS! COME ON, WHO'S NEXT?
LET ME AT HIM! LET ME THROUGH! I'LL CRACK THE MARROW FROM HIS WRETCHED BONES!
OH, WONDERFUL! GRUNGE!
YOU'RE MINE, BRAT! THANKS TO YOU, YOUR FATHER'S FLOWN MY GRASP!
BUT YOU'RE MINE! AND YOU'LL PAY HIS DEBT WITH YOUR SOUL!

SO THAT'S WHY THEY LEFT ME HERE ... TO COVER THE CHECK!
THANKS A BUNCH, DAD!
IS THAT ALL I AM TO YOU... A DOWNPAYMENT ON YOUR SOUL-DEBT TO THIS AMY HARRYHAUSEN REJECT?
WELL, IT'S A SAFE BET HE WON'T LET ME WASH DISHES INSTEAD...
...SO I GUESS I BETTER GET OUT OF HE--
THERE'S NOTHING THERE! SOMETHING MUST'VE HAPPENED TO MY BODY ON THE OTHER SIDE!
I'M JUST A GHOST... AND I'M TRAPPED HERE!
OH, WELL...
COME ON, YOU UGLY FREAK! DO YOUR WORST!
OH MY GOD! I CAN'T SHIFT BACK INTO MY BODY!

IMPUDENT BRAT! YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW BAD MY WORST CAN BE!
SMKK
AGHH!
...oh boy...
WHEN I HAVE FINISHED WITH YOU, HALF-LIFER, YOU WILL BE BEGGING FOR DEATH...
...BUT DEATH WILL BE JUST THE BEGINNING!
GOPGHF!
WHMP

OW-OOGFF!
D-DROPPING ME... LETTING ME GO...
...BUT WHY?
NO!
NOT YOU AGAIN! HAVEN'T YOU DONE ENOUGH TO ME?
TAKE HIM! TAKE THE BRAT IF YOU WANT HIM...
...JUST LEAVE ME IN PEACE!
GRUNGE... RUNNING SCARED?
BUT WHAT WOULD HE HAVE...
...TO BE SCARED...
...ABOUT?

THEY SLITHER IN THROUGH THE KEEP WALLS, PARTING THE STONEWORK AS IF IT WERE HEAVY DRAPES.
THERE IS NO SOUND, JUST THE COLD AND STERILE SMELL OF SOME AIRLESS, COSMIC ELSEWHERE.
FEAR SEIZES DEX'S BATTERED SOUL.
THESE ARE ETHERITES... THE SILENT, TERRIBLE SENTINELS OF THE LIGHT THAT LIES BEYOND THE ECTOSPHERE.
AND DEX REALIZES NOW THAT HE IS BUT A GHOST, THEY HAVE COME TO CARRY HIM OFF TO THAT PLACE.

OKAY! OKAY! I'LL COME QUIETLY! THERE'S NO NEED FOR VIOL--
--HUH?
THE VAST EBONY HAND UNFOLDS...
...AND IN ITS PALM IS THE LAST THING DEX EVER THOUGHT HE'D SEE AGAIN.
M-M-MOM?
DEX, MY SON.
OH, MOM!
THEY BROUGHT ME BACK, DEX, BACK FROM THE LIGHT. THEY WANT ME TO TELL YOU... OF THE DANGER.

DANGER? I KNOW ALL ABOUT THAT! GRUNGE WAS TRYING TO--
NO, DEX. MORE THAN THAT.
THEY BROUGHT ME HERE AS A MEDIUM TO COMMUNICATE THEIR MOTIVES TO YOU.
I'M JUST GRATEFUL FOR THIS CHANCE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
THE ETHERITES WOULDN'T NORMALLY INTERVENE, BUT THEY ARE CONCERNED WITH DEVELOPMENTS ON THE MORTAL PLANE.
THE EXPURGATORIUS MUST BE STOPPED FROM USING THE AURAT. THE ETHERITES WANT YOU TO ACT ON THEIR BEHALF IN THIS MATTER.
BUT I CAN'T TRACK MY PHYSICAL SELF. I'M TRAPPED HERE.
BUSINESS THERE IS TRADITIONALLY BEYOND THEIR PURVIEW... BUT NOT YOURS. THE EXPURGATORIUS NOW HAS BOTH THE AURAT AND ITS CREATOR. THE ETHERITES DO NOT LIKE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS.
NEITHER OF THOSE ASSUMPTIONS IS CORRECT.

THE ETHERITES TELL ME YOU CAN'T LOCATE YOUR BODY BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN STOLEN AND HIDDEN.
THEY CAN HELP YOU FIND IT...
...AND GIVE YOU A GREATER CONTROL OVER YOUR BIOPLASMIC FORM. BUT THERE WILL BE A PRICE.
THEY CAN? THAT'S GREAT...
...I THINK...
HEY, WAITAMINUTE...
EEARGH!
OH, MUST THIS BE SO BRUTAL, ETHERITES?
OH, I SEE. YES ...OF COURSE.

" YOU'RE RE-SHAPING MY SON... RE-SCULPTING HIS ECTO-FORM WITH YOUR LIGHT ENERGIES...
"...YES, I'M SURE DEX WILL FORGIVE YOU ONCE HE REALIZES WHAT YOU'VE DONE.
" IT'S JUST THAT IT LOOKS SO... PAINFUL. "
WHOAAA! I FEEL KIND OF STRANGE...
THEY HAVE RE-MADE YOUR ECTO-FORM, DEX... REINFORCED IT AND LENT YOU SOME OF THEIR POWER...
...YOU WILL HAVE GREATER CONTROL OF IT NOW... BOTH HERE AND IN THE MATERIAL WORLD.
AND NOW YOU MUST LOOK... WITH BOTH YOUR EYES.
O-OKAY, MOM.
HEY! A THREAD OF ECTOPLASM LEADING AWAY FROM MY WRIST!
IT IS YOUR LIFELINE, LINKING YOUR SPIRIT TO YOUR PHYSICAL BODY.
WITCHES CALL IT THE ARIADNE THREAD. YOU CAN ONLY SEE IT WHEN YOU USE YOUR DEAD AND YOUR LIVING EYES TOGETHER.

NOW YOU SHOULD GO. FOLLOW THE THREAD.
OKAY, BUT FIRST...
...DID YOU KNOW LEO MELHART WAS PART OF THE EXPURGATORIUS?
YES.
HE WAS A GHOST BY THE TIME I MET HIM OF COURSE, BUT I KNEW HIS PURPOSE. HE WANTED ME TO HELP HIM MAKE YOU... A CHILD OF BOTH SIDES.
HE NEEDED A LIVING TOOL TO USE ON EARTH, SINCE HE WAS EXILED TO THE ECTOSPHERE.
BUT WHEN WE BEGAN TO LOVE EACH OTHER, I SAW THAT DARK PURPOSE CHANGE. THAT WAS WHEN HE BECAME A FATHER YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF, DEX.
A MAN DEDICATED TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE VILE CREATURES.
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT THEN WHY DID HE GO ALONG WITH THAT LIAR AUGUSTINE?
WOULD HE HAVE LEFT YOU ALIVE IF HE'D MEANT YOU HARM?
HE HAD A DEBT TO PAY...
...AW, I DON'T KNOW! WATCH FOR ME, MOM.
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN.

THE HERMITAGE...
LEO... SO GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK WITH US.
AND THAT'S A FINE ECTOPLASMIC BODY YOU'VE WOVEN FOR YOURSELF. BY GIVING YOURSELF FORM LIKE THAT, YOU'VE PROVEN THE ALIRAT WORKS.
GET TO THE POINT! WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME HERE? WHY DO I NEED THIS FACSIMILE BODY?
WE NEED YOUR SKILLS, LEO, AND YOU COULD NOT EMPLOY THEM WITHOUT A HOST VEHICLE TO GIVE YOU FORM; UNLIKE ICE AUGUSTINE...
...YOU DON'T HAVE AN OAF FOR A BROTHER TO POSSESS AND INHABIT THIS WORLD.
MAYBE I WON'T HELP YOU. I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY PROOF OF THE THREAT ICE AUGUSTINE MADE TO GET ME TO FOLLOW HIM FROM GRUNGE'S KEEP.

I WASN'T LYING, MELHART. WHILE I WAS HUNTING YOU IN THE ECTOSPHERE, BROTHER TOM WAS FETCHING YOUR SON'S CARCASS FROM ITS RESTING PLACE.
CROSS US NOW, AND WE'LL MAKE SURE HE STAYS A GHOST.
WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?
ALIGN THE AURAT FOR US. OPEN UP A GATE. WE WANT TO ACCESS THE ECTOSPHERE... AND THE RAW, ECTOPLASMIC POWER THAT LIES THERE!
POWER? IT'S ALWAYS THE WAY...
...WELL, I CAN OPEN A GATE FOR YOU... BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT THAT KIND OF POWER?
WE KNOW WHAT WE WANT, MELHART.
WE'VE WORKED FOR IT LONG ENOUGH.

YOU KNOW BEST, I'M SURE.
VERY WELL...
EXCELLENT! MANIPULATOR ...ACTIVATE THE TURBINES. WE MUST STRENGTHEN THE AREA'S FOCUS!
YES SIR, CARDINAL!
AS SENIOR HERE, I WILL BE FIRST TO RECEIVE THE INVESTITURE OF POWER
WITH A THRASHING WHINE POWERFUL TURBINES ON THE SEABED CHURN INTO LIFE...
...RIPPLING THE CHOPPY WATERS AROUND THE RIG INTO A WAVERING BUT UNMISTAKABLE PATTERN.
THE HERMITAGE NOW SITS AT A FOCUS OF POWER CREATED BY THE ELEMENTAL FURY OF THE OCEAN ITSELF.
MY GOD, THIS IS TRICKY! I'M NOT USED TO ECTOPLASMIC FINGERS.

BEFORE ANOTHER WORD CAN BE UTTERED, SEARING LIGHT EXPLODES INTO THE GLOOM...
IT'S OPEN! THE CONDUIT IS OPEN!
THE LIGHT! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, MELHART? IT'S TEARING THE CARDINAL APART! DESTROYING HIM!
'DESTROYING', FRIEND SENATOR? NO..
...REMAKING WOULD BE A BETTER WORD...
HI, FOLKS! D'YOU MISS ME?
WHOOPS! IS THIS A BAD TIME?
YES! YES! GIVE ME THE POWER, TOO!
THIS IS MADNESS! YOU'RE ALL CRAZY!

MELHART'S BRAT HAS RETURNED TO HIS BODY!
AUGUSTINES! KILL HIM!
I TRACE MY LIFELINE ALL THE WAY BACK HERE, AND THIS IS THE GREETING I GET?
YOU CAN SHOVE IT!
WHAK
CARDINAL! THE AURAT'S POWER IS SPILLING... WASTING! LET US THROUGH SO WE CAN JOIN YOU!
HMPH! HMPH!
YOU REALLY THINK I'M GOING TO SHARE IT WITH YOU?

I DON'T NEED YOU ANYMORE!
I HAVE WHAT I WANT!
AAIIGH!
EEIGH!
NOW I WILL DEVOUR YOUR SOULS!
THAT THE BEST YOU GOT, DEXY-BOY?
WHUK
SHUT YOUR MOUTH, AUGUSTINE!
I JUST KEEP ON COMING, MUNGO!
GEE, I LOVE THE FEEL OF MY NEW, STRONG BODY!

SO DO I!
KRWOKK
NOW THAT FELT GOOD. EVERYTHING FEELS GOOD.
I DUNNO WHAT THE ETHERITES DID TO ME, BUT WHEN I SEE THEM NEXT I'M GOING TO SHAKE 'EM BY THE--
OOPS!

" NOW THAT'S NOT GOOD. "
" DEFINITELY, CATEGORICALLY NOT GOOD AT ALL! "
DEX! YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO THE AHRAT AND THROW IT INTO REVERSE!
I'M KINDA BUSY, DAD...
...BESIDES, WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU? YOU SOLD OUT TO THEM!
YOU GAVE THEM WHAT THEY WANTED! YOU BETRAYED ME!
I HAD NO CHOICE! THEY WERE GOING TO KILL YOU!
I COULDN'T LET THEM DO THAT! I... I LOVE YOU, SON!
THE JET-STREAM OF PRESSURED ECTOPLASM BLASTS THE THING THAT WAS THE CARDINAL BACK ACROSS THE CHAMBER...
...AND DEX DIVES TOWARDS THE PULSING AHRAT.
OKAY, DAD! I'LL TRUST YOU ONE LAST TIME! NOW HOW DO I DO THIS?

SWING THE ORBITS OUT OF ALIGNMENT! CLOSE THE CENTRAL APERTURE!
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY! GEE! IT'S RED-HOT!
TOO LATE, WHELP! ONCE ACTIVATED THE AURAT MUST FULLY CYCLE! IT CAN'T BE TURNED OFF!
SOMETHING GRINDS... SHRIEKS LIKE A GIANT GEAR THROWN OUT OF TRUE.
THE BLINDING LIGHT FLICKERS AND BECOMES A TORNADO OF ENERGY THAT FALLS BACK IN UPON ITSELF.
NO, BUT IT CAN BE REVERSED!
THERE! NOW MOVE IT BEFORE--
AND THEN EVERYTHING COLLAPSES IN AFTER IT.
THE DEMON'S GONE! CAN'T WE SHUT THAT THING OFF NOW?
I DON'T KNOW! JUST TRY TO HOLD ON!

I HATE TO SAY IT, DAD... BUT THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH LEFT TO HOLD ON T--
"DAD?"
"DAD?"
TAKE IT EASY, DAD. WE'RE IN THE ECTOSPHERE... SOMEWHERE.
MY BODY'S SAFE-- I JUST NEEDED TO CHECK ON YOU...
HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN OUT?
SEEMED LIKE FOREVER. I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T COMING BACK.
I THINK WE BEAT THEM. THE AURAT EXPLODED... SOME KIND OF OVERLOAD.
THE EXPURGATORIUS, THE AUGUSTINES... THEY'RE ALL GONE.
THEN IT WAS WORTH IT.
I NEEDED TO REDEEM MYSELF... MAKE UP FOR MY MISTAKES. YOUR MOTHER'S LOVE SHOWED ME MY FAULTS...
...MY FAITH IN YOU SAW ME THROUGH THE DARKNESS.

I WAS SO IGNORANT. SO FOOLHARDY. I SOLD MY SOUL TO GRUNGE, FOR GOD'S SAKE! WHAT A CRAZY THING TO DO.
STILL HE'LL NEVER GET IT NOW.
WHY NOT?
LEO.
BECAUSE THEY'VE COME FOR IT.
I'VE MISSED YOU, MY LOVE.
I CAN'T TAKE THIS. I GET YOU TOGETHER AGAIN...ONLY TO SAY GOODBYE?

YOU'VE GOT THINGS TO DO, SON. A LIFE TO LEAD.
MINE'S BEEN FULL OF WONDERS, AND YOU CHIEF AMONG THEM.
TAKE CARE, DEX. YOU WILL NEVER BE OUT OF OUR THOUGHTS.
I...
HEEEY! I CAN HEAR YOU! IN MY HEAD!
AND WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, UGLY?
GO ON! YOUR PLAYMATES ARE LEAVING YOU BEHIND!
IS THAT SOMETHING YOU FIXED WHEN YOU REBUILT ME?

YOU STILL NEED ME TO DO--?
SAY WHAT? WHAT THINGS?
THE AURAT'S NOT BEEN DESTROYED? THEN WHERE--?
NO! WHY WOULD HE...?
HE'S A WHAT... A WHAT? WHAT DOES HE WANT IT FOR?
OH, NO... I CAN'T!!
I CAN'T DO THAT!!
I WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE, WOULD I?
DON'T MISS THE NEXT EXCITING ECTOKID SPECIAL!
AS DEX BEGINS A QUEST THAT WILL TAKE HIM TO THE ENDS OF THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT!
MEANWHILE... WRITE YOUR THOUGHTS ON DEX'S BOLD NEW DIRECTION!
ECTOKID % MARVEL 387 PARK AVE. SO. NY, NY 10016

"Saint in Neon"

BY Elaine Lee

Sally Kate Piner slumped back into the shadows, pressed her aching shoulder blades into the dirty brick wall, and tenderly stroked the barrel of her daddy's Smith and Wesson 38 Special Police Positive with the middle finger of her right hand. It reminded her of her childhood, this gun. She closed her eyes against the flashing neon light, and pressed the butt of the gun to her face. The smell of powder and metal put her instantly home in Tennessee, shooting wooden pins off the clothesline in back of the house, and making daddy laugh. Sally Kate lowered the gun. She looked at the flashing sign. Then, she looked, for perhaps the thousandth time, at the strange graffiti scrawled on the alley wall: *"Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"*

Her cracked lips moved silently as her empty eyes scanned the scrawl. Dimly, a lone thought worked its way to the edge of her conscious mind. "My Saint," said the thought, "A saint for the lost, the abandoned... and for murderers like me."

She'd been in the alley for hours, waiting for "him" to leave his seedy room and walk out the main door of the fleabag hotel. Of course, she knew the man's name, had known it for... how many years? Eight? Ten? But, since that night... the night she'd come to understand what "he" had done to Jess... to her baby... well, she couldn't wrap her mind around that name somehow. Now, it was always "him" or "that monster".

The knowledge of his crime and the daily care of her ruined child had eaten away at Sally Kate, turned her into a bitter, obsessive woman, her mind filled only with trial transcripts, police reports, and the dates of "his" parole hearings. Her husband, unable to reach her through the great wall of her grief, had finally left her in that house of pain. Yes... her husband had failed her and the laws of her country had failed her, and her church! Her church had failed her, too...when they couldn't explain how a loving God could let "that monster" brutalize her child. *"Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"*

Sally Kate saw "him" now... through the dirty glass door, just beneath the flashing hotel sign ...HOTEL NO-TELL, in a ring of blinking pink neon. He was talking to the night clerk and smiling, maybe telling a joke or just pretending to be human but Sally Kate knew better. "The monster" would walk out in a moment. He'd cross the street and she'd have to shoot him...do the job the State should have done and didn't. *"Oh, god, oh help me! Help me Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"*

Her desperate eyes rolled heavenward. A flash of neon! Hot pink lightning seared its message—HOTEL NO-TELL—into her starving retinas. Then, NOISE like all the screams of the damned filled her head. She would have covered her ears, but she needed both hands to lift the gun. She lifted it and she tried to aim, tried to see "him" through the pink rings of light that danced before her eyes. *"Is that you, you monster?"*

She looked, for perhaps the thousandth time, at the strange graffiti scrawled on the alley wall: "Help me, Saint Sinner! Answer my prayer!"

"Yes," said a voice like a cool rain riding the fiery breath of angels, "a monster is just what I am."

But, it wasn't "him." Not her "monster." A handsome young man—with an angel's face and a demon's eyes—was emerging, god-like, from the pink mandala of flashing neon light: HOTEL, a mantra to the homeless, NO-TELL, to the faithless, a hymn of faith. But, for this one, for Saint Sinner, the glowing circle of gas-filled glass, made holy by the power of human need, was a gate to every world and time.

"Who are you?", Sally stammered, already half-knowing, as she looked at Saint Sinner down the barrel of daddy's gun.

He turned his demon eyes on the woman, exposing the ornate scarring that covered the side of his face, like a beautiful wound. "I am the answer to your prayers."

Then, he was reaching out to grasp the gun's barrel and she was letting go and suddenly, his hands were on her, filling her head, her whole being, with NOISE and LIGHT. And, in that moment of loud/bright joining, she knew! She knew Philip Fetter, the boy he'd once been, before the coming of the demon, Runesmith. Through the Saint's mind, she felt the demon enter the boy, enter as a mind-rending sound, forcing the boy to kill and kill and kill again. Next, she felt how the Angel had come, as a blinding LIGHT, shielding him from the NOISE, yet searing the three spirits into Philip's one flesh... welding them together.. . a triad, for all time.

Then it was Sally who reached out, searching between these warring spirits, the dark and the light, to hunt for Philip Fetter's human soul saying, *"Saint... Saint Sinner... the Man who walks Between."*

"Yes... yes... know me," he whispered, moving his hands over her, filling her with his power. "Knowledge heals."

Then Sally started to change...growing smaller, younger, new! The particles of her body sang, and threatened to spin away from her living core. Dying cells regenerated. Middle-aged skin came alive with the bright shine of youth, pink and hot as neon. Bones strengthened. Muscle went supple. Coarse gray hair became golden and soft.

Standing before the demon-eyed man was a pretty female child. She was fair-haired and dimpled and playing dress-up in her mommy's clothes. No sign of pain or hardship had touched the peach-soft cheek. Saint Sinner winked one demon eye then, pocketing her daddy's gun, stepped into the alley's darkness away from the flashing sign, and the girl smiled. She called out to that other man... to "him," across the street, the one coming out the dirty hotel door. "*'Scuse me! 'Scuse me, Sir,*" she lisped softly, "*I'm lost, Sir. Can you help me, please?*"

The man, with only a hint of the monster moving behind his mild features, smiled widely and moved toward the child. "Yes... yes, of course, Dear," he crooned like milk as he crossed the street, stuffing his twitching fingers into the pockets of his pants. "Here, Dear...come with me right over here...here in the shadows. Shadows are good, Dear. Shadows are my friends."

But, these shadows weren't friendly. They were packed with anguish. Two vise-like hands were waiting there to clasp the monster's head. The hands began to pulsate and glow, sending twin forces into the man's shaking frame. One, jagged and dark, ripped through his trembling body, a hateful buzz saw, giving birth to a scream. The other burned into him laser-bright, blinding, choking him with unbearable heat, so the infant scream is stillborn, dead in his tightened throat. Through his agony, beneath Saint Sinner's hands, "he" felt himself change. Bones grew brittle, muscles weakened, skin withered. Fast, so fast! And, as the NOISE receded, he heard the child laughing. As the BRIGHTNESS faded he saw her, dimly, through aged eyes.

Crumpled in the alley, very near the laughing child, was a very old man, too old to harm anyone, too old to be a threat. The old man groaned and the child laughed once more, flinging her small body into the happiness dance. She would never be a murderer! He would never harm again! She whirled and stomped, jumping out of her too-big shoes, kicking and spinning, and was finally lifted high off of the ground by the hands of the Saint. He held the child and kissed her.

The NOISE was softer now, like a song, and the LIGHT was spring sun on new leaves. Sally Kate Piner, her child's lips brushing the lips of the Saint, felt herself growing, this time in the right direction. Her limbs lengthened, her body ripened and, as her bare feet stretched to touch the waiting pavement, long-dead feelings surged through her woman's flesh, and she kissed him truly and not as a child!

Saint Sinner started and pushed the woman away, the human blood still hot in his angel's face. "I can't... can't lose myself. The demon, he'll take me... make me do things!" He wheeled away from her, stumbled and ran. She started to follow, to run after and catch him, but a flash of something caught her eye. There, just there, in that window! What was that?

Sally Kate Piner stood frozen on the dingy street, transfixed before the pawnshop window, staring at a reflection ... a reflection of a girl no more than twenty. The girl was bathed in pink neon light and she was there... and then not there... and then there, again. "She's so pretty," thought Sally, laughing, as the neon sign flashed on once more. NO-TELL.

"That's right," she thought, laughing again. For the girl was Sally Kate and she was no murderer and she was young again and whole, and... *"no... I won't tell anyone!"* ■